2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

The close link of brother and sister is also reflected in the kinship terminology. The common term used by both men and women to address sisters is *cemwali* and it is also applied to all women out of respect. But the term which is used descriptively and sometimes in address, cross-sexually, is *alumbwangu* (my sibling-of-opposite sex). It is self-reciprocal and thereby expresses the special relationship between the man and his sisters. Two sisters address each other in everyday conversation as *cemwali*. When it is necessary to be more specific an elder addresses the younger as *akuluwanga*. These are also descriptive terms. A man addresses his younger brothers as *apwanga* while they address him as *acimweni*. Women also address their elder or younger brothers as *acimweni*. This word is widely used as an honorific title but it is especially used for people who are in authority. The chief, for example, may be referred to as the *mcimweni*, and men frequently call their mother's brothers and other senior matrilineal male relatives by this term. An elder brother has the same duties towards his younger brothers as to his sisters, so that use of the term of address *acimweni* here indicates his position of authority over them.

From the point of view of a warden, his sorority-group is essentially made up of his sisters. We have seen that he is responsible for his younger brothers in exactly the same way as he is for his sisters, though technically they are not his sorority-group. He also has control over his sister's children so that ideally a warden sees his sorority-group as his sisters and their daughters and their daughter's daughters and so on. But a man's sister's daughters will probably have as their warden their own brother who stands in the same relationship to them as their mother's brother stands to their mother. The matrilineage is therefore organized internally in a system of inclusive sorority-groups extending from the eldest surviving member down to the youngest. However, a component sorority-group of a matrilineage does not begin to appear as a corporate group until the man who is to be its leader is old enough to take charge of the affairs of the women under him. Naturally, the age at which this happens is largely a matter of circumstance. Theoretically a man may not take charge until he has been initiated. But Yao boys nowadays are usually initiated at about 8 to 10 years of age. Obviously a child of this age cannot take over the affairs of his adult sisters, so that his mother's brother looks after

613 562 593 604

them until he grows up. It is only when the boy becomes adolescent that he begins to take an active part in these affairs. This may begin in a small way. He may, for example, accompany his mother's brother when he goes to consult a diviner. Or he

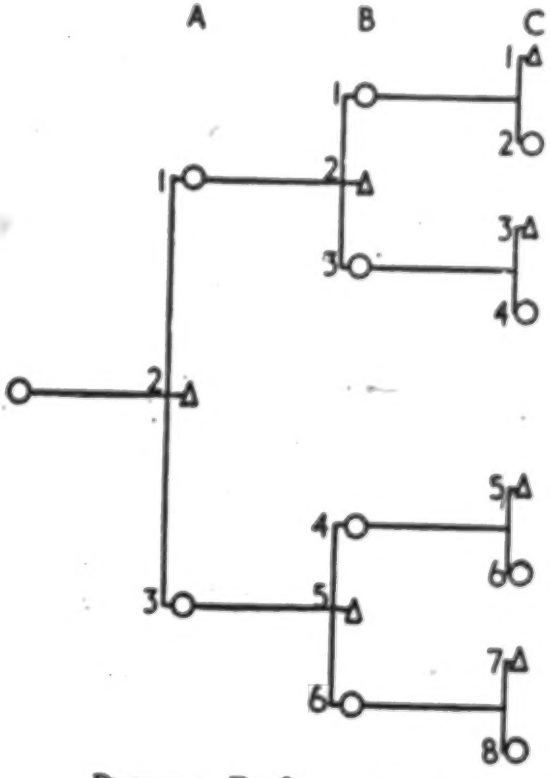

DIAGRAM 3. THE SORORITY-GROUP.

A3 sees his sorority-group as being composed of A1 and A3 and by extension *their* children.
B2 sees his sorority-group as B1 and B3 and by extension *their* children.
B5 sees his sorority-group as B4 and B6 and by extension *their* children.

may be given the charge of the conjugal affairs of one of his newly-married sisters. Gradually he assumes more and more responsibility. His mother's brother on the other hand falls more and more into the background and becomes rather a consultant than an active participant.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

622 613 561 the children of Ncilaga (C5) and Bt. Mkwinda (C6). There was a big difference in the ages of these two women. Ncilaga died nearly 30 years ago but Bt. Mkwinda died in 1948. When Cikoja V (C1) died in 1936, Salimu II (D3), who was born in about 1914, was very much younger than the present Cikoja VI (E7), who was born about 1895. Ncilaga (C5) had no sons, nor had Atabiya (D1), her eldest daughter, so the succession passed to the only son of Amaliama (D2) who was the senior male in that generation. Salimu II, genealogically senior to the present Cikoja, is to be the next headman. He has married a 'cross-cousin' (his mother's mother's brother's daughter's daughter's daughter) and lives in the village. He has already taken over the affairs in one section of the village. The other section has moved out and built about half a mile away with the present Cikoja VI. Note that the junior house—i.e. the descendants of Citeleka (A2)—are completely out of the succession. Wegami's (E1) eldest son, Cilimba (F1), is living virilocally with Cikoja VI in his section of the village and is already opposed to the prospective village headman Salimu. He is likely to be the village headman after Salimu dies and may even push his claim when the present Cikoja VI dies, because Salimu has been accused of sorcery on several occasions.

622 578 604 The conflict between sister's sons and mother's brothers at successions has all but fallen away. The people oppose with some vigour the idea that a younger brother should succeed. Frequently the chief or headman would rather his younger brother succeed, and sometimes indicates him as his successor. Kawinga, for example, has given his pre-succession name of Mlomba to his younger brother and many say this is tantamount to announcing Mlomba as the next Kawinga. This is violently repudiated by most people I have spoken to and they indicate a sister's son as the likely successor. Jalasi too, before he died in 1941, indicated Mbawa, his mother's younger sister's son as the successor, but when it came to the point a sister's son succeeded. The weight of custom is in favour of the sister's sons and usually the succession is fought out among uterine or collateral brothers in the first descending generation.

643 662 A matrilineal relative is always chosen to be chief in preference to any other, but sometimes there is no heir. Other things being equal an unsuitable matrilineal relative will be chosen, or a

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

part of the normal duties of a matrilineage leader to his kinsmen.[1] But ideally each marriage is supposed to have two marriage sureties. The first, or senior, surety is called *mkokuwogona*, which was described to me as 'the log that lies at the doorway'. The picture here is of a wise old man who cannot move around too easily, but who sits at the doorway of his hut ready to give advice and information to his younger kinsmen. In contrast to this is the junior surety. He is called *mkupamame* or the 'beater down of dew'. He is pictured as a young man, who is vigorous about his daily tasks and who is waiting before the dew has evaporated in the morning, at the door of couples who have difficulties. He is essentially the 'one who walks about'.

The senior marriage surety is ideally supposed to be a mother's brother, while the junior marriage surety is supposed to be a brother. In fact, while the junior marriage surety is almost always a brother, though not necessarily an elder brother, the senior, for reasons which will emerge later, is frequently not a mother's brother. However, in the Yao mind the two are fixed in the relationship to each other as mother's brother and sister's son. The fundamental conflict of their positions is expressed by the opposition of the concepts of the 'recumbent log' and the 'active man'. This view is consistent with the segmentation and internal differentiation that must go on within a lineage. As the segments of the matrilineage become progressively independent of each other, the senior relatives, who formerly held them together, become less and less active in their affairs. In Yao idiom they become 'recumbent logs'.

The relationship between mother's brother and sister's son therefore is fundamentally ambivalent. By the values surrounding the concepts of descent and relationship, a sister's son and mother's brother are close kin and bound together in their attachment to a common ancestry and to a common set of living women who are in their joint care. At the same time the mother's brother, belonging as he does to the parental generation, must be respected by his sister's sons. Recalcitrant sister's sons may be made to toe the line by a number of different sanctions. A mother's brother, for example, may take his case to an arbitrator and bring the force of public opinion to bear upon his

[1] I have described the rôles of the marriage sureties more fully in *Marriage among the Matrilineal Yao*.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

604 627 sister's son. This, however, is not common because matters such as these, the Yao feel, ought to be settled within the matrilineage, or at least among kinsmen. The more usual procedure is for the mother's brother to take his complaint to some senior matrilineal relative who may be a perpetual mother's brother of the mother's brother, as say Cibwana Kawinga is to Cikoja.[1] Or if the matrilineage is part of a village, the mother's brother may take his case to his village headman, who is as likely as not his perpetual father. The senior relatives have the force of authority and public opinion behind them and frequently some agreement can be reached at this level. Where this is not possible, say because the perpetual elder relative lives too far away, the mother's brother may take the sister's son to court and bring the sanction of the Native Authority's punishment upon him. This is very rare.

604 781 There is still a certain mystical sanction behind the mother's brother's control over his junior relatives. This is based on the curse, which in turn draws on the belief in common ancestor spirits. A mother's brother may say to a sister's son or other junior matrilineal relative: 'If you have never sucked from the breast of my sister, nothing dreadful will happen to you.'[2]

604 754 The fear of sorcery is another force which operates to control the wayward activities of a sister's sons. People in senior generations are usually looked upon as having particularly wide knowledge of potent medicines. Though a sister's son may sometimes use sorcery against his mother's brother, the reverse is believed to be more likely to happen. I have recorded elsewhere[3] the details of a case where a sister's son left a village, against his mother's brother's wishes, to find work in town. He subsequently met his death in an accident while trying to get the honey out of a wild bees' hive in a treetop. At home his death was attributed to the sorcery of his mother's brother whose will he had frustrated.

604 578 On the other hand the sister's sons, while bound by an ethical code to honour and respect their mother's brothers, find that in fact these stand in the way of their own personal ambitions. A man's heir is his sister's son and it is quite understandable that there should be some tension between a man and his heir. But

[1] See p. 132. [2] See Chap. VI, p. 135.
[3] 'A Note on the African Conception of Causality', 34-5.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

the opposition between mother's brothers and sister's sons in general has a much wider basis than this. Any man is likely to have more than one sister's son of whom only one is his heir. Yet his other uterine nephews are as much opposed to him as the heir is. The tension lies in the position of the mother's brother *vis-à-vis* his sister's sons within the segmenting lineage. The different sorority-groups within the matrilineage are held together through the authority of the mother's brother. This coercive force is undermined by the attempts of the wardens of the various sorority-groups to break away and form new villages of their own. In this way the segmentation and differentiation of the matrilineage is really a facet of the general political process in which groups are for ever trying at once to demonstrate their autonomy by setting up new villages, and their unity by remaining in large integrated villages. Conflicts between sister's sons and mother's brothers, therefore, are common.[1] For a typical example we need not go outside the village that I have chosen to illustrate the localized matrilineage.

Ali Kasunka (C6) fell out with his mother's sister's daughter's son Mwanace (D10). The trouble started when Ali Kasunka who had married the sister of the cook came to live uxorilocally in Chiwalo's area. While in Zomba he had asked Mwanace to come to live virilocally in his village to keep things in order. It soon became apparent that the women were not satisfied with Mwanace and every time that Ali Kasunka visited them they had tales to tell of his failure to keep the peace. Ali Kasunka then decided that he would move his village from Zomba area to Chiwalo's where he was married, so that he could stay married to his wife in Chiwalo's area and keep control over the village. Soon after the change had taken place the infant daughter (E15) of Biti Mtemula (D19) became ill and died. Ali Kasunka went to the diviner with Adusoni, the child's father's marriage surety, to establish the cause of the death. The diviner indicated that it was the sorcery of Mwanace. Ali Kasunka took no action on this at all, but he remembered it. Some time later he himself became ill and this time his sisters Asausyeje (C8) and Biti Kasembe (C5) went to the diviner. Once again he indicated that Mwanace was responsible because he was jealous of Ali Kasunka's authority in the village. Tension increased when the husband of Biti Sale (D15), Wayison, became ill. His wife immediately went to tell

[1] In 31 village splits involving matrilineal relatives, 9 hinged on MB-ZS conflicts.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

Mwanace. He was the junior marriage surety to the marriage and it was his duty to go to the man's marriage surety, report the matter and arrange to take some action to get the man well again. Mwanace, however, refused to take any action. Instead he tauntingly said, 'Take the matter to Ali Kasunka, it is his village.' The woman did so, and Ali Kasunka asked immediately whether she had not taken the matter to Mwanace. She replied that she had and repeated Mwanace's words. Ali Kasunka took the matter up with Mwanace who now objected to being ordered about. Ali Kasunka, however, impressed on Mwanace that the village was his (Ali Kasunka's) and the authority rested with him. He then went to the man's home to tell them of Wayison's illness. The man's representative came and he and Ali Kasunka consulted a diviner. They found that the man was ill from *ndaka*, which he had contracted in his home village. They found medicine and treated him and he recovered.

Things came to a head in 1947. Mwanace's younger sister Nyangu II (D11) was married to a soldier who was away. One morning she came to her mother's elder sister, Mbalasyao (C1),[1] and told her that she had found semen on her pudenda and could not recall having had intercourse with anyone. Mbalasyao told Ali Kasunka about this. It was clearly a matter for divination and Ali Kasunka called Mwanace and told him that they ought to consult a diviner. But Mwanace's attitude, even in such a crisis as this, was hostile. He refused and said it was not his work to do this sort of thing. Ali Kasunka therefore went to a diviner with his sister Mbalasyao. The diviner said the semen was Mwanace's. He said that he had entered her hut magically and had sexual intercourse with her without her knowing it.[2] When Ali Kasunka got back to the village he called Mwanace and asked him what tricks he was playing in the village. Mwanace said that he had done nothing—it was not his village. Ali Kasunka then vaguely hinted at his crime. Mwanace pressed for more details and Ali Kasunka accused him outright of sleeping with his sister. He had hardly uttered the accusation before Mwanace had drawn a knife and attacked him. Mwanace was screaming something to the effect that Ali Kasunka had come to him with lies about having seen a diviner. Ali Kasunka beat off the attack and reiterated the accusation. Mwanace now turned his rage upon the woman and tried to catch her. Two of the men in the village then caught Mwanace and subdued

[1] Her mother, Amaliama, was dead.

[2] This is called *ciwuwenya*. It combines the use of magic with sister-incest. To the Yao mind there could be no clearer proof of sorcery. I have already mentioned the importance of sister-incest in relationship to the beliefs surrounding the sorority-group. See p. 146.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

him. The woman in the meantime had run to Chiwalo's hut half a mile away. Here she complained to the chief that Mwanace wanted to kill her. Chiwalo refused to listen to her complaint and sent for Ali Kasunka. When he had come and explained the sequence of events, he continued saying that he would like to take the case to court. Chiwalo, who was Ali Kasunka's wife's father's sister's son (hence a classificatory younger brother) and whose henchman Ali Kasunka was, refused to arbitrate in the case but referred it to Kawinga. On the day of the case the woman's husband came back from the Army. The case was tried and eventually the court assessors awarded a damages claim of £3 to be paid by Mwanace to his sister. The husband, at the same time, said that he could not remain married to her because whenever he saw her he would think that she had slept with her brother and in court he gave Ali Kasunka a marriage termination payment. The tension between Ali Kasunka and his 'sister's son' did not end there however. When they got back to the village Ali Kasunka remonstrated with Mwanace saying, 'Are you not ashamed to have married your sister?' Mwanace said that he could not stand that sort of thing and went back to live uxorilocally.

A crucial point in this case history is that the women did not like Mwanace. Almost certainly there would have been a split in the village had the women had more confidence in Mwanace. The tension between Ali Kasunka and Mwanace, although the conflict is inter-generational, started, as it consistently does, from the relationships of a man to the women of his matrilineage. Without the support of the women, younger brothers or sister's sons are impotent against the power of their senior relatives. It is only when they can induce the women to follow them and to leave their rivals that they can found a new village and thereby begin to earn prestige. Therefore, although the men are the active agents in bringing about a physical act of fission, they are in fact only making manifest a situation which is latent within the lineage.

The position of the senior male matrilineal relative is of fundamental importance in questions involving segmentation. His position is seen most clearly in the dominant matrilineage, in which the name of the village is inherited. The Yao practise 'positional succession'. A man not only succeeds to his mother's brother's name but also to the position of the mother's brother in the social structure as a whole.[1] It follows that when the

[1] See Chap. V, p. 121.

593 601 The children of maternal uncles (C 6 and 8) and of paternal aunts (C 2 and 4) are called cousins *ankwiwanè* (sing. *mwiwanè*), and, conversely, the children of maternal aunts (C 7 and 9) and of paternal uncles (C 1 and 3) are called "brothers and sisters"; one would address the other as "*chwanzè*" or "*ankwanzè*," but either is taboo to the other.

601 605 It is interesting, therefore, to note that cousinship is of two kinds: the relationship between a child and his maternal aunts' children or his paternal uncles' children is *wanko*, whereas the relationship with his maternal uncles' children or his paternal aunts' children is *uiwanè*.

[611] It is easily understood why the maternal aunts' children are considered as brothers and sisters, as among the Yao, matrilineal descent is the rule, the children taking the clan of

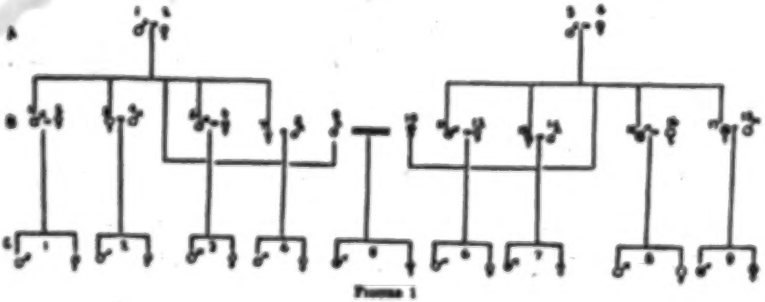

FIGURE 1

the mother. In the diagram, this is indicated in black. That the paternal uncles' children bear the same relationship would seem to indicate that matrilineal descent is not absolute but that dual descent from both parents is recognized.

Children C 5 may not marry C 7 and 9, nor C 1 and 3. In the case of the former, this is because persons of the same clan may not marry, but in the case of the latter, no such reason is given but they are simply said to be brothers and sisters. Children C 5 may [582] marry their cousins C 6 and 8 and C 2 and 4, but this is not very common as it is said such marriages are always unhappy.

601 604 The wife of a maternal uncle (B 12) speaks of her nephew by marriage (C 5) as *nawo*, husband, because, in the event of her husband's death, this nephew would inherit from him and he might marry the widow.

601 A parent-in-law or child-in-law is called *mkwapwe* indifferently. Paternal and maternal grand-parents, and great-uncles and aunts are all called *anhuju*; a grand-child, *chizukulu*.

The words *atati* and *amao* commonly mean father and mother, but, as given above, there are other words for these two parents, whereas *atati* and *amao* are applied to certain aunts